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Making Room for You

**Helping Mildred**  
**Shalom: To Be Made Well**



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## ACT BOLDLY WITH GENTLENESS

Jesus amazes us with his calm composure in the midst of the storms that surrounded him. He astonishes us by greeting his disciples on Easter with, "Peace be with you!" This is the example we follow as we strive to be boldly gentle.

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VOICES

## Humble Obedience

by Terri Lackey

ONE DAY, JUST TO LEARN WHAT IT WAS LIKE, I ANSWERED THE PHONES AS A CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE. My task was to solve complaints. I prayed the phone wouldn't ring, and when it inevitably did, I grimaced and reluctantly tapped the connect button. I found it difficult to answer irate customers with gentleness, to smile into the phone and meekly say, "You could be right."

That was a simple act of humility. Had someone suggested that I carry my own cross, to die so others might live, I certainly would have balked. I couldn't go to my death in stoic silence. But Jesus did. He was boldly, yet humbly, obedient.

In "The Final Steps," Bryan M. Cones walks us through Holy Week and the journey Jesus made—from the joyful procession of Palm Sunday through his suffering and death on the cross. The celebration of resurrection is yet to come. "And so we wait in silence on Holy Saturday for the sun to set," he writes. "We wait in silence for the Son to rise."

We celebrate Easter knowing that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again, and that our Good Shepherd is always with us. "After all is said and done, what most of us want to know is that we are not alone in this world," Melanie Alman McRae writes in "For You Are with Me."

Kati Kluckman-Ault tells us in "Shalom: To Be Made Well" that believing is seeing. The hemorrhaging woman knew that if she touched Jesus'

hem, she would be healed. And so she was. Even more than that, she was made well. "The gift of our salvation is that God again has made us well and whole," Kluckman-Ault says.

Speaking of wholeness, marketers try to convince us that a perfect face and figure will get us there, asserts Catherine Malotky in "Making Room for You." And so we buy. "What marketers know is that we all feel pretty vulnerable." But it doesn't have to be that way. When we make time for people, we are showing them that they are valuable.

Asking for help shows strength as well as humility, says Kathleen Kastilahn in "Helping Mildred." "Why are we so hesitant to ask for help? Do we not listen, really listen, to Scripture?"

Jesus received his death sentence with humility, and we celebrate his humble victory this month. We also acknowledge Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who acted boldly to resist the Nazis. Lisa E. Dahill writes that Bonhoeffer found himself in a situation where he felt he had to act, though it cost him his life.

As we make our way through Lent, Holy Week, and finally the celebration of Christ's resurrection, may we humble ourselves, take the form of a servant, and become obedient, whatever the cost.

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Terri Lackey is managing editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.



GIVE US THIS DAY

## Gentle Respect

by Marj Leegard

"YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN KIND TO ME. I PRAY THAT THE LORD WILL BE JUST AS KIND TO YOU." RUTH 1:8 (CEV)

How comforted would we be if that gentle prayer were prayed for us? Certainly God does not filter divine loving kindness through our kindness. And that is a good thing. We pray in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others," but we are always mindful that we are not patterns for God to follow.

Naomi could pray that prayer because she had that kind of relationship with Ruth. Their common love for Naomi's son involved the whole family. And that is not easy. For Orpah, that lonely strange path to an unfamiliar country was more than she could bear. She went back to her mother, to her customs. We all understand that feeling, for we have reluctantly passed from "stuffing without raisins" to "stuffing with those sticky little black things" to honor the customs of the other family. We have pitted stir-fry against side pork with cream gravy and lost that battle.

For us, marriage vows have not always addressed the most difficult problems nor rejoiced over the gift of another family. Naomi was a widow, not a happy position in that time and place. She had kind daughters-in-law and she said so. She was not territorial where her sons were concerned but shared them happily with Orpah and Ruth. Those blessed men they married, like ours, had enough faults and virtues for the fussing of both mother and wife.

Some liturgist could write a prayer for forgiveness for insisting that Christmas Eve should always be spent at our house. And another rubric for closing eyes to the rules that grandmothers break at the cookie jar and the candy dish when grubby little hands are outstretched.

Are you saying, "Let's not ruin the wedding ceremony with all of this stuff"? If we want to be able to pray Naomi's prayer for her daughters-in-law, it would be good to think on these things.

Naomi was walking to her faraway home, surprised by who wanted to go with her on that road. She had time to stop. She knew the easier way for Orpah and Ruth. They knew what they wanted to do. It only required a pause on the road to talk it over. To treat each other kindly as God would treat them. To have respect for the opinions of their companions. Gentle treatment for life-altering problems. Loving solutions for each one. Ruth and Naomi chose to go on together. Two women bound their lives together and became matriarchs of the family line of Jesse and King David and the manger baby in Bethlehem.

They did not know, nor do we know, what the consequences of friendship will be. We only know that God has promised to hear our prayers and gently pour out blessings.

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Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

## APRIL

compiled by Audrey Novak Riley from sources including *Renewing Worship, Sundays and Seasons*, and *Lutheran Book of Worship*, published by Augsburg Fortress, Publishers ([www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org))

The first part of this month falls in Lent. Then come Holy Week, Easter Sunday, and the beginning of the season of Easter.

4

## BENEDICT THE AFRICAN, CONFESSOR

Born a slave, Benedict was a Franciscan friar who served his community as a cook. His gentle wisdom inspired the community to elect him their head; when his term ended, he happily returned to the kitchen. Benedict's humility makes him a model for all who hold leadership roles. He is a patron of African Americans.

6

## ALBRECHT DÜRER, MATTHIAS GRÜNEWALD, LUCAS CRANACH, ARTISTS

Dürer, whose "Praying Hands" is known worldwide, recognized that his talent was a gift from God. He died on this date in 1528. Only a few works by Grünewald, a teacher of Dürer's, survive, but they are masterpieces. Cranach was a friend of Martin Luther's. His woodcuts illustrated Luther's German-language New Testament.

9

## SUNDAY OF THE PASSION (PALM SUNDAY)

Today, Christians sing "Hosanna" and process with palms, as we have done since the earliest days. The hymn, "All Glory, Laud, and Honor," *LBW* 108, has long been part of today's worship. The procession is followed by the solemn proclamation of the Passion. And so Holy Week begins. See page 22 for more.

9

## DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, THEOLOGIAN

This German scholar was a leading spokesman for the Confessing Church, a resistance movement against the Nazis. He was executed on this date in 1945. See page 26 for more.

10

## MIKAEL AGRICOLA, BISHOP OF TURKU

Bishop Mikael translated the New Testament, hymns, prayers, and the liturgy into Finnish—all in three years. He died in 1557.

13

## MAUNDY THURSDAY

Lent ends late this afternoon, before the evening Maundy Thursday service. What does "Maundy" mean? It comes from the Latin *mandatum*: commandment. In John 13:34, Jesus tells the disciples whose feet he has washed: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." "Maundy" isn't about washing feet, or communion, or even service: It's about self-sacrificing, steadfast love.

The glorious liturgies of these three days (the Triduum) have ancient roots, but were only restored in the last few decades. Many of our Christian sisters and brothers—Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic—keep the liturgies in almost exactly the same way, with the same joy in the salvation our Lord won for us on the cross.

**14****GOOD FRIDAY**

Thursday's evening service did not end with the usual blessing and dismissal, and tonight's does not open with the usual greeting. What's this about? The three evening services of the Three Days are really all one grand liturgy.

**15****VIGIL OF EASTER**

The great Vigil of Easter brings us the story of God's saving work in a feast of Scripture: from the creation story, through the Passover, through the prophets and psalms, to the Resurrection. God continues that saving work with Baptism and Eucharist, as we sing alleluia, glory to God!

**16****THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD (EASTER DAY)**

In 1732, some young men of the Moravian community of Herrnhut (just over the German border from Prague) went out to the cemetery at dawn on Easter Sunday to sing hymns and meditate on Christ's resurrection. That was the seed of the Easter sunrise services so popular today. The Moravians, our full communion partner, still go out to the cemetery for Easter sunrise services, with the choir and a brass band.

**19****OLAVUS PETRI, LAURENTIUS PETRI, RENEWERS OF THE CHURCH**

These two brothers brought the Lutheran movement to Sweden. Together they published a complete Bible in Swedish and a revised liturgy in 1541.

**21****ANSELM, BISHOP OF CANTERBURY**

As bishop, Anselm struggled with kings over their interference in churchly affairs; as mystic, he wrote about the maternal love of God. He died on this date in 1109.

**23****TOYOKI KAGAWA, RENEWER OF SOCIETY**

This peacemaker founded schools, hospitals, and churches. He was arrested for trying to reconcile Japan and China in 1940. He died on this date in 1960.

**25****MARK, EVANGELIST**

Mark's Gospel is probably the earliest of the Gospels. Tradition tells us that it was written in Rome shortly before the year 70. That was a time of persecution of Christians in Rome and Jews in Judea; in 70 Jerusalem was destroyed. No wonder the Gospel feels so hurried—the writer might have been hearing the tramp of Roman soldiers' feet even as he dipped his quill.

**29****CATHERINE OF SIENA, THEOLOGIAN**

This bold and brilliant woman advised rulers and popes, telling them what they needed to hear, whether they wanted to hear it or not. (She wrote to a pope who was afraid of being poisoned: "Be not a timorous child, but manly.") She worked tirelessly for peace in her church and peace in her country. She died on this date in 1380.

# making room for you

by Catherine Malotky



Gertrude Malotky, 102

Sometimes I worry about what's happening out there. I worry because I'm a mother, a citizen, and a woman of faith.

When I turn on the television, I see marketers selling things to us. That's the point, of course. But should we be worried about the stories being told to get our attention? The dramas, the reality shows, the daytime soaps, even the evening news

seem exaggerated to grab my interest. My observations:

I'm hooked on the crime scene mystery shows, where persistent investigators solve a puzzling murder or two. How did it happen? Who did it? What does the evidence say? What fascinating detail will entice me to keep watching right into the commercials?

The reality shows are too much for me. David Walsh, of the Institute on Media and the Family, would say that these shows skip the story and go straight for the stuff that captures our attention: fear, sex, laughter. Most of them are about competition, not about healthy human interaction. (The only ones I can really stand to watch are the ones where the rescue nanny comes and patches up a nasty family dynamic. Sometimes I find good ideas to take into my own life.)

And then there are the soaps. The story is the point here, and oh, the drama! Who will fall in love with whom? Who will break up with whom? It feels like the tabloids, live, right in your family

room. But most of the characters need serious work on their values and social skills.

The news used to be pretty much news. Now the news is as much about ratings as reporting. Now the anchors need to be chummy and the investigative reporters need to sleuth out scandal. Sometimes it's worth it. Most of the time it's just hype.

### A DIFFERENT ANGLE

Are we just crabby old fogies if we feel this is not quite right? Are we just hearkening back to the olden days? Should we be worried about the messages we and our children are getting through video games and billboards and magazines and e-mail spam? What are those messages saying to us? Should we fight against all those marketers who are bent on capturing our particular market share and influencing us to buy something?

Rather than thinking of ourselves as victims, let's look at this from a different angle. The truth is: Marketers know a lot about us. Marketers spend a lot of money trying to find out what motivates us to act. They know what we like to do with our spare time, how we spend our money, and what we hope for, because they have surveyed us, worked with

focus groups, and kept track of our shopping decisions.

What marketers know is that we all feel pretty vulnerable. They know that most Americans want to fit in—to be loved, have friends, be admired and maybe even respected, and have some measure of financial security. We want our families to be healthy and our children to be successful.

What marketers also know is that we feel pretty stressed. Life isn't easy these days. Admittedly, most of us don't have to toil as our grandmothers did. We don't cut wood in the grove for the stove or do the laundry in a tub. We don't heat the water for the weekly bath over a fire, and most of us don't know the name of the cow that gives us our milk, nor do we can vegetables in August to eat in February.

Instead, we live from paycheck to paycheck. If our children are young, we struggle to find time to use the breast pump at work, or fight traffic to get to the day care center before it closes. If our kids are older, we juggle extracurricular schedules and spend our weekends next to the field, at poolside, or in the bleachers at a gym. If we are empty-nested, we might be working extra to help with those college bills, or to save for retirement, which we

weren't able to do earlier. If we are recently retired, we are often busier than before, volunteering and visiting far-flung family and friends. Even if we are old enough to have begun to cut back, we worry about our health or being a burden, or wonder why the kids don't call more. And by then we are living with grief all the time, because the people we love are dying, one by one.

### UNDERSTANDING OUR WORTH

In this rush of living we are vulnerable, because our lives generally aren't all that we might hope. Circumstances, our own foibles and wounds, and our struggles with others all conspire to make our lives less than perfect. Marketers know this, and that's where the products they are trying to sell come in.

It's ironic that we humans will work so hard to make it all work. In fact, we'll work so hard that we can get obsessed with creating a better life for ourselves and those we love. We'll do any number of things to try to ensure success. That's why the business section is full of articles about how to ask for and get a raise or how to "swim with the sharks." That's why women's magazines splash headlines on their covers about how to catch a man's eye,

or how to lose 10 pounds in 10 days, or how to find a school that will give your kids an edge. That's why ads show gorgeous women seductively selling everything from cars to toothpaste.

So, Christian sisters, where does gentleness come in? Or humility? In a world where nice girls finish last, how do we understand our worth and our influence? How can we, with values like gentleness and humility, make the world a better place and our own lives more whole?

#### **GRANDMOTHER GERTRUDE MALOTKY**

I am thinking of the profound gift of my grandmother Gertrude. She is 102 now, an ancient one who has seen many days. She grew up the daughter of a tenant farmer. She married the youngest son of a neighbor and followed him from the seminary to his first call in the woods of northern Minnesota. She sent her children to the outhouse with a gun, because you just never knew when a bear or wolf might come sniffing around. She traveled over the river and through the woods to bear her children in her mother's house. She has buried her parents, her brother, her husband, one of her great-granddaughters, her son-in-law, and all of her old friends.

Yet I see her in her chair, alert though easily tired. When I come into her home, her face, creased with years, lights up, and she beckons me to her side. She takes my hand and touches my face. "How are you?" she queries. "Tell me!" My grandmother, now so seasoned, makes room for me when I arrive.

This is her humility and her gentleness—she has time for me, interest in me, and room for me. She is not less because I am more. Nor is she more and therefore I must be less. Somehow, she makes enough space for both of us to be. In this, she is spiritually gifted. In this, she teaches me how God's love is.

#### **OUR POWER AS CHRISTIANS**

This is our power as Christian women. It is a potent antidote to the messages we get every day in our nice-girls-finish-last world. Like my grandmother, God makes room for you. God is interested in you, even cherishes you. God does not set up a contest to see who wins and who loses. In fact, God's love comes first. We have won before the game even starts.

We are the beneficiaries of God's space-making, God's welcome, God's interest. What difference can this make in our

lives? My grandmother's love makes me more resistant to the harmful media messages I hear every day. I can more easily deflect the messages that tell me that I must be so rich, or so beautiful, or so charming, or so gifted, or so successful, or so aggressive, or so seductive—or else I am not good enough. My grandmother's love, like God's, delights in me as I am, not as someone says I ought to be.

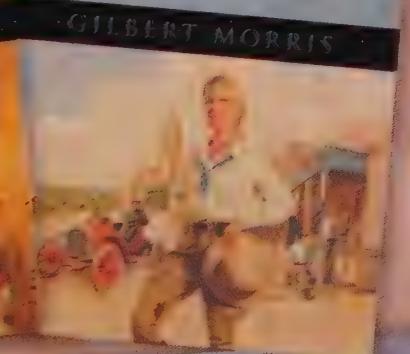
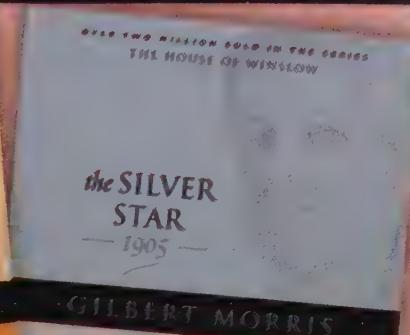
Now, sisters, if we all lived in the assurance of this kind of love, what difference might it make in the world? What if we all made room for others? What if we lit up when people came into the room, turned to them eagerly to hear the stories they have to tell, and then, in turn, shared our own? What would happen to poverty, warfare, racism, classism, sexism, and all the other scourges that plague humanity? What would happen if we lived gently and with humility?

Maybe with God's help we would change the world.

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**Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader. Her regular column "Amen!" appears on page 42.**

# ENTERTAINING STORIES of COURAGE, FAITH AND ROMANCE BRING HISTORY TO LIFE!



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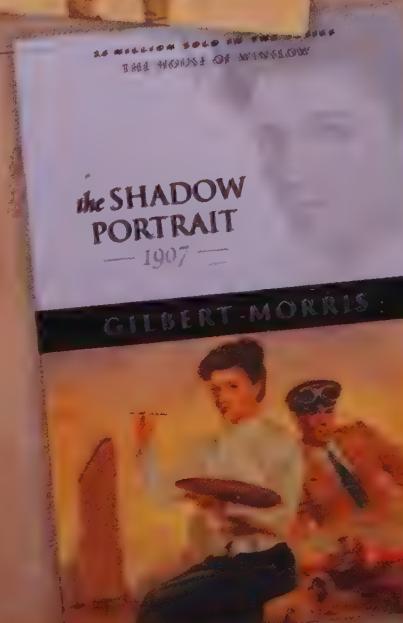
*The White Hunter* by Gilbert Morris

1903 Three Winslow women pursue their dreams in New York City—dreams that will certainly collide with reality.

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# Fighting Back after Sexual Assault

by Molly M. Ginty

**AT 3 A.M. ON A JUNE NIGHT FOUR YEARS AGO, A MAN BROKE INTO BRIDGET KELLY'S TEXAS APARTMENT, HELD A GUN TO HER CHEST, and drove her to an ATM to withdraw money. He then took her to a field, raped her, shot her in the back three times, and left her for dead.**

Kelly somehow managed to run to a nearby house, where the owner called for an ambulance that rushed her to the hospital for six hours of emergency surgery.

Against all odds, Kelly not only survived, but fought back, prosecuting her assailant (who is serving a 50-year prison sentence) and serving as a spokesperson for the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault ([www.taasa.org](http://www.taasa.org)).

"I'm determined to destroy the shame and secrecy that prevent survivors of sexual assault from getting the help they need," says Kelly.

Like a growing number of rape survivors, Kelly is going public about her ordeal. Thanks to efforts like hers, there is some cause for celebration as America marks Sexual Assault Awareness Month, held in April and sponsored by the Enola, Pennsylvania-based National Sexual Violence Resource Center ([www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)).

The National Institute of Justice reports that occurrences of sexual violence have plummeted by two-thirds in the last decade. And according to health advocates, sweeping changes in legislation, criminal justice, and medical care are helping to ease the plight of rape survivors.

In recent years, Congress has passed the 2000 Sexual Predator Prosecution Act (which mandates consecutive prison sentences instead of concurrent ones for sex offenders), the 2004 Debbie Smith Bill (which improves the processing of evidence collected in hospital rape kits), and the 2005 Violence Against Women Act (first passed in 1994 and recently amended to devote an unprecedented \$50 million to rape crisis centers and hotlines).

"These legislative changes are part of a larger trend," says Kellie Greene, founder of the Orlando-based Speaking Out About Rape ([www.soar99.org](http://www.soar99.org)). "In the last few years, we've started training victim advocates to counsel rape survivors and nurse examiners to collect forensic evidence. We've launched sexual assault sensitivity training for law enforcement officers, and improved sexual assault education in schools and colleges."

Health advocates are also making headway in their fight to eradicate the stigma of rape. "People used to ask rape survivors, 'Why were you there? What were you wearing?' and 'What were you doing with him?'" says Scott Berkowitz, president of the Washington-based Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN). "Now they're beginning to stop blaming the victim and instead focus on the perpetrator's actions."

Despite these advances, experts say much work remains. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, one out of six American women suffers a rape or attempted rape, yet only 40 percent of these

crimes are reported to police.

Why is rape the most underreported crime in the United States? Some survivors fear retaliation by their assailants, whom they know in 60 percent of cases. Some seek to avoid the judicial process, which can drag on for years with no guarantee of conviction. Some fear that state “rape shield” laws—which prohibit the use of a survivor’s sexual history as evidence—will be ignored, as happened in the 2003–2005 rape trial of basketball star Kobe Bryant, whose accuser’s name and sexual history were leaked to the press.

While acknowledging these fears, health advocates also stress the need to identify and prosecute rapists, who average eight to 12 victims. “The only way you are going to prevent this from happening to other people is to step forward and speak out,” says Greene.

Immediately after being assaulted, rape survivors are encouraged to forgo showering and head straight to the hospital to get a forensic exam (in which blood, semen, and hair samples are collected in a rape kit) and fill out a police report.

Alerting authorities will not only help survivors catch their assailants, but help them get treatment for injuries, the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and the prevention of possible pregnancy.

“Even if you’re not comfortable notifying authorities, you should at least go to a rape crisis center for counseling,” says Susan Lewis, a spokesperson for the National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

For many survivors, the trauma of rape triggers



psychological problems such as anxiety, withdrawal, hypervigilance, and depression. One-third suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a chronic condition characterized by emotional detachment, sleep disturbances, and flashbacks, and that calls for professional counseling.

To help rape survivors cope with symptoms like these, RAINN is launching the nation’s first online sexual assault hotline this month. Available at [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org), this hotline connects survivors with trained counselors through e-mail instant messaging.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, which ranks crimes in order of violence, places rape second on its list, after only murder in severity. “This is one of the most devastating traumas anyone can endure,” says Berkowitz. “If you’ve ever been assaulted, it’s vital that you reach out for support and get all the help that you need.”

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**Molly M. Ginty** lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Women's eNews*.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

National Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
[www.naesv.org](http://www.naesv.org)

Raising Her Voice

[www.raisinghervoice.org](http://www.raisinghervoice.org)

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**WHATEVER STAGE OF LIFE YOU'RE IN**, and whether you're physically fit or living with chronic illness, you can find ways to be a wise steward of your health and well-being. Our health and wholeness are important keys to responding to God's call for us and acting boldly on that call. That's why Women of the ELCA have embarked on a new health initiative for the 2005–2008 triennium: Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. This ongoing column represents our commitment to the issue of women's health.

# Helping Mildred

by Kathleen Kastilahn



Mildred bought 10 five-pound bags of flour last Tuesday night when we did her weekly grocery shopping. Her favorite brand was on sale, 10 for \$10. A bag regularly sells for \$2.19. I hefted those sacks—from the lower shelf into the cart, from the cart to the conveyor belt at the register, back into the cart, out of the cart and into my car, from the car up six steps into her house, and then down a flight of stairs to her basement. Who needs to lift weights at the gym?

Helping Mildred started simply enough one night when I asked her if she'd like a ride home. I'd just said good-night to my dad and was on my way out the door of the retirement home where he lived and where Mildred worked as the evening receptionist. "That would be great," she said. "It'll save me cab fare." Then one night, she asked, as she got in the car, "Could we stop at the supermarket? It'll save me walking there with my cart."

That was nine years ago. Mildred retired last spring at 95. So I pick her up at her house now. But that's about all that's changed. My friends think I do

something special. I get a lot of credit for helping Mildred.

The truth is, it's Mildred who's helped me learn what helping is all about.

That flour will be kneaded into cardamom coffee cakes—for coffee hour at the Lutheran church half a block from her house where she's a charter member. And for one friend who's recovering from back surgery and for another who has her son and his family coming to visit. It will be blended into batter for the Swedish pancakes that she'll make for lunch for several of Mildred's former telephone company colleagues, all long retired. It will be transformed into wafer-

thin *krumkake*, rolled cookies that she makes almost daily and boxes up to have ready to give away to the next-door neighbor, perhaps, who will shovel her walk before he goes to work.

I'm part of the equation: I help Mildred help. I help her keep on living the way she was raised. Many times she's told me, over a cup of tea, how her mother and father—Swedish immigrants—took care of other newcomers from their homeland. While her own list of people she looks out for is much more encompassing, including a young man from Jamaica, her motivation is the same as her parents' was.

Mildred is grateful for the rides to the store, and she thanks me. But she also expects them because it's what I can do. And she's never hesitant to suggest that we make a second stop because another store is having a sale on butter. Mildred's shown me that helping is how we get the job done of being the Body of Christ, how we're all needed—as Paul tells us in great specificity, from the eye to the foot—and that “God has so arranged the body . . . [that] the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:24–25).

How different is that view from the most famous verse that's not in the Bible, “The Lord helps those who help themselves.” God commands, rather, that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Shopping Tuesdays also teach me, week by week, about the discipline of helping. I'll admit there are some nights when I'd rather go for a walk by the lake or curl up with a book or even toss in a load of neglected laundry. But I pick up Mildred. I think committing to regular, routine, count-on-me helping has it all over practicing random acts of kindness—at least as a spiritual discipline.

I've always identified with Apostle Paul's struggle—I do what I would not do and do not do

that which I want to do (Romans 7:19)—that in fact is our human condition. But I've learned, too, that having someone count on you makes it easier to do the good that you would do. That plays out the other way around, too.

“Driving in the country, if I pass a sign about the community group that has adopted that stretch of highway and keeps it clean, I'll thank them,” Mary Ann Brussat wrote in her blog for the New Morning Show on [www.faithstreams.com](http://www.faithstreams.com). “Day after day, it's the little helping gestures that enable us to trust that we can really depend upon each other.” Brussat, who writes extensively on spiritual practices, recognizes that the people on either end of the equation of helping don't even have to know each other—ever—for the helping to be of mutual benefit.

Author and pastor Garret Keizer has spent a lot of time contemplating and researching the subject of help and takes readers along to find out what he's discovered in his latest book, *Help: The Original Human Dilemma* (Harper SanFrancisco, 2004). One of his most fascinating thoughts is his assertion that help is at the core of what it means to be human: “Over the centuries we have tried to define our species in terms of some faculty to which we can make

an exclusive claim: language, tool making or sapience,” he writes, and lists the challenges to each of these in a lengthy paragraph before concluding, “Our ability to give and receive help may be our best alternative for defining humankind” (page 4).

Later in his opening chapter he shares a concern about the challenge to this ability, particularly here in this culture. “I am also interested in the ways that our sense of obligation chafes against our desire for independence,” he writes. “We wish to be good; we also wish to be free, and if that tension is arguably human, it is definitely American.”

Ours is the “land of the free,” where self-reliance is considered a virtue, where men who picked themselves up by their bootstraps often climbed to the top, where do-it-yourself and self-help books are perennial best-sellers.

Why are we Americans so hesitant to ask for help? Do we not realize that asking for help shows strength as well as humility? Do we not listen, really listen, to Scripture?

Consider two women who get help from Jesus. The Canaanite woman whose encounter Matthew recounts (15:22–28) shouts out: “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented

# Why are we Americans so hesitant to ask for help? Do we not realize that asking for help shows strength as well as humility?

by a demon.” Jesus doesn’t answer her. She trails him and the disciples until Jesus does answer—with a *no*: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But this mother will not take *no* for an answer, even when Jesus refers to Canaanites, to her and her daughter, as “dogs.” She comes right back at him: “Yes, Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

And that gets Jesus’ attention—and help. “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” Her daughter was “healed instantly,” Matthew ends this story. But I’ve heard contemporary scholars muse that Jesus was helped, too, in this exchange. Perhaps this was the first time he realized that his call was to all.

The woman with a hemorrhage introduced to us by Mark (5:25–34) doesn’t even ask Jesus for help. Rather, she reaches out and takes it in an astonishingly bold move—as she “came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak.”

It worked. “[S]he felt in her

body that she was healed of her disease.” And Jesus knew something had happened, he was “immediately aware that power had gone forth from him” and looked about to see who had touched his clothes. She admits her action, and Jesus blesses her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

The women are bold in seeking help from Jesus because they know he can help them. That’s one aspect of these lessons that we women of the 21st century have to learn—again. Another is what happens after they receive the help they asked for: Community is restored, with a place for the daughter healed of the demon, and the woman cured of the hemorrhage.

Often, too often, we consider only ourselves when we ask—or don’t ask—for help. But think about it. When we actually do receive the help we need, it can benefit many others, spiraling out to those whom we touch and to even more whom we may never know. From

this perspective, asking for the help we need and expecting to get it can be considered both our duty and our delight as members of the Body of Christ.

“Ask for help when you need it” is but one of some “40 Ideas for How to Build Community” on a poster from Syracuse Cultural Workers ([www.syracuseculturalworkers.com](http://www.syracuseculturalworkers.com)) that I particularly like. It comes as a bit of surprise in the long and lovely litany of things you can do for others—from “greet people” to “pick up litter” to “organize a block party.” But it shouldn’t, not when we understand just how much asking for help when you need it helps others, too.

One of the many other suggestions proves this point—and makes me smile: “Bake extra and share it.” I wonder how many people are going to enjoy what Mildred makes from those 50 pounds of flour.

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# FOR YOU ARE WITH ME

by Melanie Alman McRae

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.*

**S**heep. Sheep. Sheep. Our religious tradition is full of them. No matter where you turn in Judeo-Christian scriptures, if you look around for any amount of time, you're bound to bump into a sheep or a shepherd or some image associated with them. Raising sheep was a common livelihood in the psalmist's day, so stories about sheep and shepherds were easy for listeners to understand.

But in our time and place, most of us aren't as familiar with these woolly animals. Many of us have seen sheep grazing here or there, but few of us have had the opportunity to feed them or pet them or work with them. A few years ago, I wanted to learn to spin wool. To do that, I was told to buy some raw wool. So I got to meet some sheep and their modern-day shepherd farmer. I found the sheep to be charming and sweet, and they were willing

to give me all the wool I needed. I was grateful for their sacrifice and got a good feeling out of the whole experience. But I was troubled by the shepherd's admission that "they're not very bright animals." I have since heard more than one owner of sheep remark that they are dumb.

Now, if this is correct, and sheep are far from brilliant, then this does not bode well for us. It is certainly not flattery. If sheep are dumb and we are sheep . . . well, you can see where this is going. For this reason and others, most of us would say that being one sheep among many is not desirable. In our culture, great value is placed on being independent and self-made, not dependent. For that reason, it's difficult for many of us to picture ourselves as sheep, one among many. It is easier for us to picture children as sheep, or poor and homeless people or

old people as sheep, always other people as sheep.

Yet the beauty of the image in the 23rd Psalm is that it includes all of us. Nobody gets out of this one—we are all exposed as vulnerable and in need of care and companionship, no matter what our ability or disability. The emphasis is not on the individuality or personalities of the sheep. The emphasis is on the bold and gentle, unfailing love of this shepherd for these vulnerable sheep and the intimate relationship between the two. What matters is not the intelligence or beauty of the sheep, but the character of this shepherd who cares for them and stays with them through thick and thin.

Here is the bold and gentle shepherd. This shepherd is known by the sheep and he knows each of them. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. The psalm describes the shepherd providing

food, water, a place for rest, guidance, and blessing. This is indeed an unfailing, faithful-to-the-end-and-beyond sort of relationship.

### Counting sheep

Though I have heard this psalm more times than I can count, its meaning changed for me when our daughter, Ana, was small. What we had in our house in those early days and years was a child whose worst enemy was not sleep itself, but the process of falling asleep. Little Ana never had an easy time of this. And therefore, let me tell you, her parents did not have an easy time, either.

When you live with a child who struggles with sleep, you will try anything to solve the problem. Believe me. And try anything, we did. We read books that told us to turn on lights, so we turned on lights. We read books that told us to turn off all the lights, so we turned off all the lights. We tried closing her door. We tried opening her door. We tried playing music. We tried making the house as quiet as a tomb. We tried having her sleep in her own bed. We tried having her sleep in a sleeping bag on the floor in our room.

Perhaps our desperation reached its highest in the days when we found ourselves crawl-

ing out of her room on our hands and knees trying to sneak away without her knowing, only to have her pop up right as we cleared the threshold. Our most creative attempts took the form of song and dance that we performed in order to “shoo all the scares” out of her room so she could sleep. Needless to say, all of these things worked for a while, and then they didn’t.

There was, however, one sure thing that always worked, one thing that never failed to have the child snoring in five minutes. This magical thing was to stay with her. To lie down with Ana in her bed or to take her into our bed with us always worked. All that this little child needed to know was that we were there and that we weren’t going anywhere. *For you are with me.* That said it all. And it still does. That bold and gentle presence never fails.

*For you are with me.* In my experience that seems to be what it all boils down to, for little sheep and big sheep, for young sheep and old sheep. After all is said and done, what most of us want to know is that we are not alone in this world. And that is the sum of faith, too: trusting that no matter what comes, even the darkest valley, even when death itself comes, we will not be deserted.

### Every Sunday

You and I will soon recall the Holy Week story, the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. We have just retold and relived this good shepherd’s story, of his life and death and the way that his spirit lives on—the miracle of Easter. We celebrate Easter and we continue to celebrate this shepherd’s faithfulness today.

Every Sunday as we gather together, we are witness to this faithful presence. As we stand with one another through the ups and downs of life, we are incarnations of this faithful presence. Every day that we have the courage to face whatever comes, we live into for you are with me. It is this very faithfulness that frees us to love and care boldly and faithfully. No matter what comes. *You are with me.*

That, my friends, is the bold and faithful love that is ours for the taking . . . and for the giving. The One who made us knows us and loves us like that shepherd knows and loves the sheep. We are not alone.

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# WE RECOMMEND RESOURCES FOR ACTION, ADVOCACY, PROGRAMS, OR FURTHER STUDY

## LISTENING TO GOD

In *Listening to God: A Guide to Discernment*, you can explore what it means to discover God's hopes and desires for your life and what it means for your group as a whole to discern what their God-given gifts are for ministry within a congregation or community. This Women of the ELCA resource is divided into six flexible hour-long sessions. Call 800-328-4648 to order through Augsburg Fortress (\$6.95 plus shipping).

## TAKE THE LUTHERAN COURSE

If you loved *The Lutheran Handbook*, you'll love *The Lutheran Course*. Based on *The Lutheran Handbook*, the course takes you through the fundamentals of Lutheranism in seven sessions. Each session features a large-group DVD presentation with top-notch theologians, followed by small-group time that works through the ideas with depth and humor. *The Lutheran Course* includes *The Lutheran Handbook*, a leader's book, a DVD, and workbooks. A starter kit for \$54.99 includes a handbook, DVD, leader book, and workbook. Visit the Augsburg Fortress store online ([www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org)) to learn more.

## GET OUR STEWARDSHIP PLANNING GUIDE ONLINE

They're out of print copies, but you can still get *The Women of the ELCA Stewardship Planning Guide 2005-2006: Act Boldly* online. Introducing the Act Boldly theme, the guide helps you and your circle become more intentional about stewardship

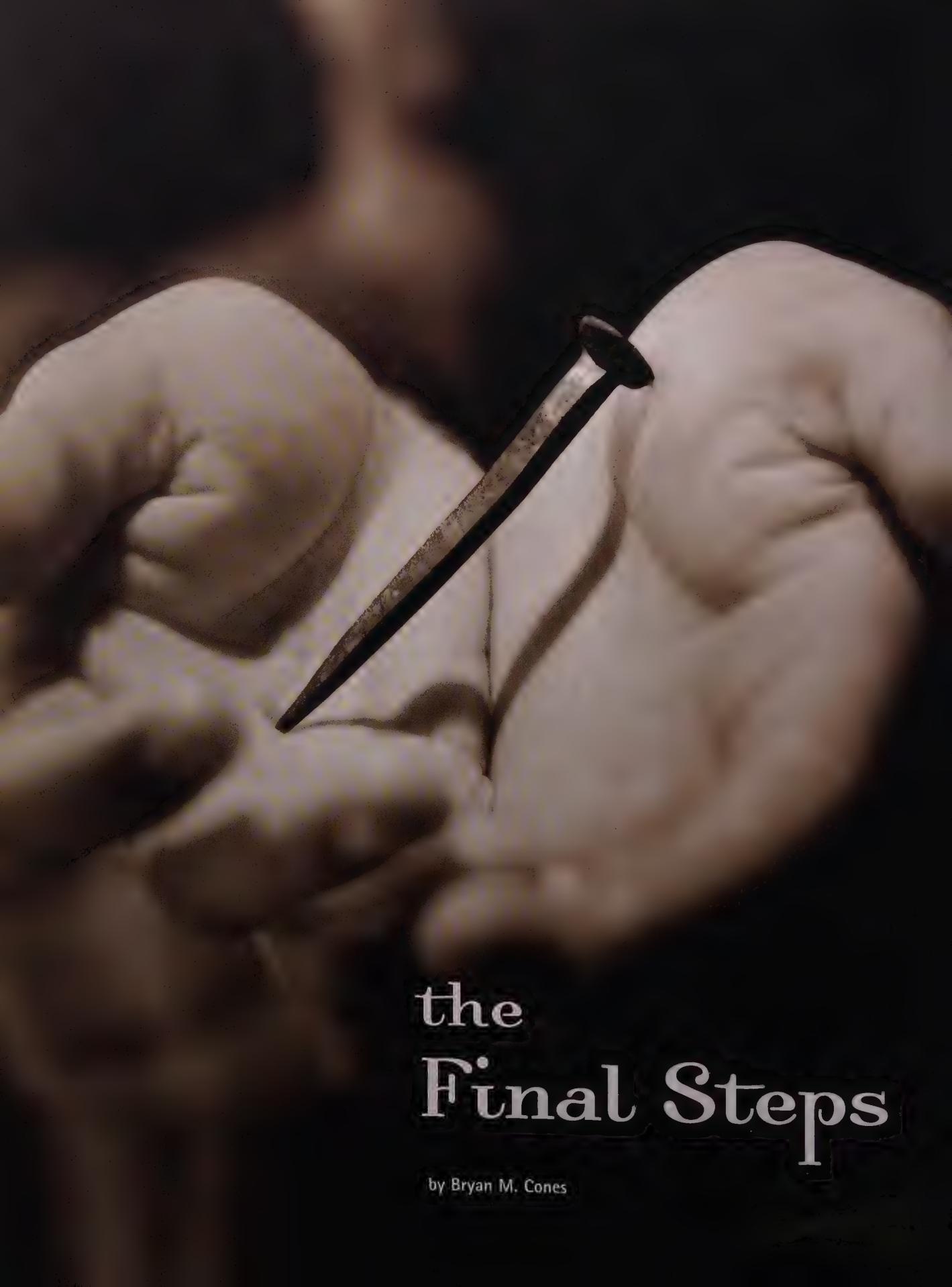
education and planning for ministry. The guide offers Thankoffering resources, a Bible study focused on the theme text, 18 monthly and seasonal devotions, and much more. Download it at [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org). See it under Quick Links on the right side of the home page.

## BIBLICAL WOMEN COME ALIVE IN LEADERSHIP LESSONS

Our knowledge of women in the Bible is limited: Only a handful of women are actually named. Dr. Jeanne Porter, a popular inspirational speaker, retreat leader, and ordained minister, helps us all look to these women for leadership training in her newest book, *Leading Lessons: Insights on Leadership from Women of the Bible* (Augsburg Books, 2005). This book combines thought-provoking biblical study with contemporary stories to present eight lessons on the God-given gift of leadership. Call 800-328-4648 to order through Augsburg Fortress (\$12.99 plus shipping).

## NOTHING IMPORTANT HAPPENS WITHOUT PRAYER

Go on a prayer journey across the church. In the Northern Great Lakes Synod, the Internet is helping connect people who pray. Learn about a prayer scrapbooking ministry in Rochelle, Illinois. Intercessory prayer ministry is modeled by Bethlehem Lutheran, an urban African American congregation in New Orleans. This video titled "Prayer" from ELCA Mosaic Television shows you how to get a prayer ministry started in your own congregation. Watch it online at [www.elca.org/mosaic/Prayer](http://www.elca.org/mosaic/Prayer), or buy the 30-minute DVD or VHS tape. Part of the program, which also explores the scriptural foundation of prayer, was filmed at the Sixth Triennial Gathering of Women of the ELCA in San Antonio last July. To order, call 800-638-3522 ext. 6009 (\$19.95).



# the Final Steps

by Bryan M. Cones

*The 40 days of Lent* have been described by many as a journey with Christ to Calvary, passing through the cross to Easter's resurrection. Its disciplines of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer slowly strip away the distractions that keep us from following that way more closely. In this "stripping," we journey with those who are preparing for Baptism and Holy Communion at the Vigil of Easter, those who are preparing to enter the paschal mystery we celebrate and live.

Yet the days of Lent do not simply fade away. They lead us to a more intense time of preparation and celebration, when to the disciplines of Lent are added the services of Holy Week, which, like fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, re-form us powerfully into the image of Christ we received in our baptism. Whether we celebrate these liturgies with the community or not, their signs and symbols reveal to us the significance of these days. Each moment leads us more deeply into what living as Christ's disciples requires of us.

### SUNDAY OF THE PASSION, PALM SUNDAY

The first moment in our Holy Week journey is, of course, Palm Sunday, a day of both triumph and tragedy. We begin worship in joy, waving palms to greet the Savior, crying out as did those gathered in Jerusalem centuries ago, "Hosanna

to the Son of David." We acclaim a king, remembering always that his reign is not one of domination, but of service; his royal steed, after all, is a humble donkey.

But our procession, like all our Holy Week worship, is not mere reenactment; by moving our bodies, crying out in acclamation and song, we enter deeply the beginning of the paschal mystery, not just with our minds but with our whole selves. Though we do not rejoice in Jesus' death itself—it was, after all, a great injustice—we indeed give thanks that God's plan of salvation has come to fullness in Jesus and is coming to completion in us. The mystery we celebrate is not relegated to the past; it is powerful and active in the present, and it propels toward the future, when God's reign will be revealed in all its fullness.

Our joyful procession leads us to a somber destination, the

reading of the Passion, this year according to Mark. Having joined Jesus in his joyful entry, we faithfully follow him also to suffering and death; his kingly throne is the rough-hewn wood of the cross. We cannot pretend, even for a second, that this journey ends anywhere but there. And where our Savior goes, we must follow. Palm Sunday is, in a sense, an overture to all of Holy Week.

### MONDAY, TUESDAY, AND WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Although we do not gather in church to mark the days between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday, they are days of preparation, a time of silence and prayer. We reflect on Jesus' growing awareness of what lay before him, on the great test of faithfulness he must have endured, perhaps even on his fear that he would not be up to the task.

Wednesday reveals an even greater sorrow: Jesus' betrayal by one of those closest to him. We remember that like so many people in our own day, Jesus experienced abandonment, rejection by his friends, the terror of being truly alone.

Yet we also take comfort in Jesus' perseverance to the end, even in the face of betrayal. We, too, face anxiety, challenges to faithfulness, betrayal by those we love and trust. But with Christ's strength bearing us up, we can face the trials before us.

## MAUNDY THURSDAY

Lent passes with the setting sun on Thursday of Holy Week, leaving us at the doorstep of the holiest moment of the church year: the three days of the Triduum. In these days we celebrate the paschal mystery of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection in such great solemnity that we cannot help but be changed.

Maundy Thursday begins simply: A brief instruction leads us to a confession of sin and a sign of peace, acknowledging that only when the body of believers is reconciled to God and one another can we take up our worship.

The heart of Maundy Thursday—the commemoration of the Last Supper—is, surprisingly, a

Gospel lesson about the supper that leaves out the bread and wine! Though we do not forget the elements of Holy Communion, John's Gospel reminds us that the fruit of our communion must be service: “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14–15). Our communion is empty if the Christ whose body and blood we share does not bear the fruit of service within us.

If Jesus' words alone weren't enough to make the point, the washing of feet after the Gospel proclamation shapes us powerfully, inviting us to make visible in our bodies the Gospel we have heard and acclaimed. Together we accept the challenge to be servants of all, especially those in need. Though sometimes it is only the minister who performs this task, the Gospel makes clear that Christ commands all his disciples to the same duty.

In some congregations, the entire assembly takes part in this action, washing and being washed, profoundly embodying the charge to do the same in the world around us. The naked feet alone, worn and rough, without the shoes and socks that protect and comfort,

reveal our common vulnerability, our common humanity, the common toll that the road of life exacts on bodies and spirits.

Thursday offers a final poignant moment: the stripping of the altar. Though merely a preparation for the stark Good Friday service, it recalls Jesus' own “stripping”—of honor, of authority, even of clothing—to become a common prisoner. It cannot help but remind us of those who have also been stripped of everything, even their human dignity, and call us to their aid. It recalls as well our own Lenten stripping, through which our fasting, almsgiving, and prayer has awakened us to the demands of our baptism. Even the sounds of worship are stripped as we leave in silence, without even a benediction to bear us up.

## GOOD FRIDAY

The solemnity of Good Friday is matched only by that of Easter itself; Christians see Jesus' death as the climax of his self-offering to God, the culmination of an entire life given for the world's salvation. Such generosity leaves us filled with awe and wonder.

Three moments mark our celebration of Good Friday: the solemn reading (even singing) of John's Passion, the long and ancient bidding prayers for the

sake of the world, and the solemn meditation before the cross.

Though Palm Sunday also included a Passion reading (always from Matthew, Mark, or Luke, depending on the year), Good Friday's Gospel is always from John. His account is one of complete triumph: Jesus never falters, is always in command, challenges his accusers, and finally reigns as king from the cross. For John, Jesus' death is his glorification as well.

Though it seems a paradox, we Christians do glory in Christ's cross, for through it God has redeemed the world. Even in our most humbling moments, we already share Christ's victory over sin and death. Even the greatest suffering cannot undo what Christ has accomplished.

The bidding prayers, among the most ancient in Christianity, like the washing of feet on Maundy Thursday, reveal again the heart of our ministry as baptized people. Just as no Christian life is complete without service, so too our baptismal priesthood is left unfulfilled unless we intercede with God on behalf of all the world. Our prayers are joined to Christ's ultimate prayer on the cross, and so we solemnly pray for the church and its ministers, for those preparing for baptism,

for the unity of Christians, for the Jewish people, for all believers and those who do not believe, for civil leaders, for the sick and dying—in short, for everyone.

Indeed, it is our duty and privilege to pray with Christ to God for the salvation of the world, not just on Good Friday but every day, in every moment.

When our voices fall silent, we stand, maybe even kneel, once again before the mystery of Christ's saving death: "Behold, the life-giving cross on which was hung the salvation of the whole world," the minister announces; "Oh, come, let us worship him," the congregation responds (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, Minister's Desk Edition, p. 142). In one exchange we summarize the Christian life, one lived always before the mystery of Christ's saving death. As an expression of both awe and wonder, some Christian communities kiss, embrace, or venerate the cross in some other way, for in its shadow we have been redeemed.

## HOLY SATURDAY

It is easy to forget Holy Saturday; with no church service of its own, it seems but an afterthought, a necessary length of time to get to the "third day" before Christ's resurrection. But it can be a deeply poignant time, a time to rest in the

deep silence of the tomb. We live a Holy Saturday much of our lives, a time of holy waiting for the fullness of God's promise.

In this time we are separated from loved ones who have gone before us, and we suffer with those who are dying. In this time the world groans still beneath the weight of death, drowned by hurricanes, shaken by earthquakes, choked by pollution. In this time the poor await the fullness of the good news promised them, laboring under the heavy burden of injustice, racism, war, and disease. In this time the dead await the trumpet's call to glory.

But in this time Christ waits as well, sharing the sleep of death, embracing our humanity even into the depths of the earth, into the darkness of the tomb. This is Holy Saturday's good news: Our God accompanies us not just to death but beyond. Emmanuel, God-with-us, is indeed with us even in death's dark valley.

And so we wait in silence on Holy Saturday for the sun to set. We wait in silence for the Son to rise. We wait in silence for life without end.

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# ACTING BOLDLY

by Lisa E. Dahill

## LUTHERAN PASTOR DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WAS HANGED AT FLOSSENBÜRG CONCENTRATION CAMP IN GERMANY ON APRIL 9, 1945. HIS EXECUTION WAS PERSONALLY ORDERED BY ADOLF HITLER

just days before the collapse of the Nazi regime. The 61st anniversary of Bonhoeffer's death coincides this year with Passion or Palm Sunday in the Western churches, the day that opens the holiest week of the Christian year.

Bonhoeffer's life is a story of Christian boldness. After receiving his doctorate in theology from the University of Berlin, he studied further in New York. There, at an African American church in Harlem, he discovered the living power of the gospel in the worship and testimony of people most white Christians scarcely noticed. Also during this time, Bonhoeffer befriended a Frenchman who introduced him to both pacifism and a new experience of the Sermon on the Mount. Here, too, Bonhoeffer heard the Bible come alive, not merely as intellectually interesting material, but as the life-changing Word speaking to him. The brilliant scholar fell in love with Jesus Christ. His

biographer calls this conversion a turning point, "when the theologian became a Christian." And when he returned to Germany, he took his new passion home to a changing world.

In January 1933, six months after Bonhoeffer's return from New York, Hitler was sworn in as chancellor. All the ways Bonhoeffer had been formed came together in resistance. Two days after Hitler's swearing in, Bonhoeffer—only 26 years old—gave a

nationally broadcast radio address denouncing a *Führer* (leader) who allowed himself to be worshiped and thus became a *Verführer* (misleader). In April 1933, Bonhoeffer sought to persuade the clergy of his Berlin-Brandenburg Lutheran church to resist the new regime by rebuking the state, caring for Jewish victims of injustice, and even engaging in civil disobedience.

In 1934, his initiatives contributed to the formation of the Confessing Church, the one-third



*In the courtyard of the Military Prison in Tegel, with captured officers of the Italian Air Force, early summer of 1944. From left: Mario Gilli, Dante Curcio, First Sergeant Napp, who had the photographs taken, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edmondo Tognelli.*

of German Protestants who resisted the “Nazification” of the church taking hold across Germany. Bonhoeffer took up national and international roles in the emerging ecumenical and peace movements, and at home turned his energy in 1935 to the cultivation of communities of Christian prayer and solidarity able to sustain resistance to Nazi brutality over the long haul.

Ultimately Bonhoeffer’s discernment led him to more direct action against Hitler. In the early 1940s, with war raging throughout Europe and talk of

our lives—indeed, as Lutherans, we realize it’s impossible! For Bonhoeffer, discerning God’s will was a process that is never simple and often unpredictable, but always rooted in a life oriented as fully as possibly to God’s leading.

Perhaps Bonhoeffer gives us a window into Martin Luther’s famous advice to “sin boldly—and trust in God’s mercy and grace more boldly still.” What might it mean to “sin boldly”? Luther wasn’t advocating immorality any more than Bonhoeffer was justifying murder by appealing

greater danger—Bonhoeffer gives us testimony of astonishing joy.

He learned to trust that we are saved entirely by grace, precisely by giving our life in bold responsible action for others and thereby landing in the arms of God. He learned to follow God’s leading with nothing held back, and to grow in the capacity for love to the very end. One of his last writings was the poem “Von guten Mächten,” of which five verses appear in *With One Voice* (#736) as “By Gracious Powers.” Its final verses read:

*Today let the candles shine  
warm and bright  
which You have brought  
into our darkness.  
If it can be, lead us back together!  
We know that Your light  
shines in the night.  
By gracious powers  
wonderfully sheltered,  
we await trustfully  
whatever may come.  
God is with us every  
evening and morning,  
and without fail each new day.*

## WHAT MIGHT IT MEAN TO “SIN BOLDLY”?

the “final solution” beginning to circulate, the Bonhoeffer family realized that they could not stand by and watch as the government of their nation devastated millions of people. Yet to effect a coup and set up a non-Nazi government required killing Hitler. How could Christians participate in a murder plot? They faced an impossible dilemma.

How do people discern the will of God in a situation where no option, including doing nothing, is free of sin? This is a crucial question for us all, reminding us that keeping ourselves sin-free and unstained is not the point of

to a higher good. For both, sin remains sin and is never to be trivialized or justified. Yet haven’t we all been in situations where we can’t see a way ahead that doesn’t cause pain or guilt? If we think we are required to remain sin-free at all times we will never speak a word, never risk any action in this complex world—we will certainly never become bold!

Ultimately Bonhoeffer and his fellow conspirators failed; they went to the scaffold that April innocent of Hitler’s blood. But in his attempt to follow the Lamb wherever he leads—even endangering his own life for those in

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## Session 8

# Act Boldly with Gentleness

by Sue Gamelin



## LET'S TALK

Think of someone you know whom you would describe as a gentle person. Tell the group by completing the sentence, "I thank God for the gentleness of . . ."

### Gentling Ourselves

It isn't easy to talk about people we would describe as gentle. To begin with, many of them don't like being talked about! And then, many gentle people do their works of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, and self-control so humbly, so quietly that we don't often notice them.

Any conversation about humility needs to begin with our humble, gentle, courageous, loving Lord and Savior, Jesus of Nazareth. During this season of the church year we follow Jesus to the tumult of Jerusalem, to the horror of Golgotha, and to a tomb swept clean by a wind from God on a spring morning. As we travel, we sing with Apostle Paul one of the world's great hymns. It's written in Philippians 2:6-11. We sing of our Jesus who "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

How can we humble ourselves, how can we

be gentle in this way? We can't. There is only one who could do this: Jesus, God's only Son, the Word made flesh and living among us. Grace and truth filled his life, his death on a cross, and his death-shattering resurrection. "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace," John's Gospel cries out across the ages (John 1:16).

Grace upon grace. That's what Paul was talking about in Galatians 5:23 when he wanted us to know that gentleness, or humility, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Turn toward the orchard with which God blesses us, grace upon grace. Breathe in the rich perfume of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Gentleness is our focus today. Let's pick up the fruit of gentleness and examine it carefully. Note that on its rind, in addition to the word "gentleness," we find "humility" written there. "Meekness," too. Biblical translators have had a difficult time finding an English word that carries the fullness of the Greek word that Paul used in his letter to the Galatians. He used the word *praotes* (prah-OAT-ace). We might define *praotes* by naming what it isn't. *Praotes* isn't being angry over things that don't call for anger. It isn't being aggressive in putting ourselves first. It isn't being harsh, ruthless, or callous. *Praotes* means being angry when anger is demanded by injustice and abuse. It means calling attention not to ourselves, but to the good news we want to share.

about God's work in the world. It is about being tamed, as a horse is tamed or gentled.

Being gentle, humble, or meek is being like Jesus. He is angry when he realizes that the merchants in the temple had turned that house of prayer into a marketplace (Matthew 21:12–13). He refuses to be angry when he is hauled before Caiaphas, the high priest, after his arrest; he doesn't dignify with an answer the false charges brought against him but uses the moment to proclaim God's power (Matthew 26:59–64). Jesus stuns us with his calm composure in the midst of the storm that surrounded him throughout his ministry. He astonishes us by greeting his disciples on Easter evening with, "Peace be with you!" and not, "Where were you when I needed you?"

My daughter, Jill, is boldly gentle. She is an artist. In our living room we have an amazing sculpture she made just before her college graduation. We love telling visitors that it's our \$80,000 sculpture. They take another look and then glance around at the rest of our modest home, and then we explain that that's how much Jill's college education cost!

Jill's work, her vocation, her ministry, is with art students who are mentally and physically challenged. "Oh, art therapy," people say when she says what she does with her degrees in art. "No," she gently responds, "I work with artists. They come to our center to do art." And they do. Some of the artists are autistic, and some have been injured in accidents. Some have cerebral palsy, and others have Down syndrome. Jill sees the artist in each one and rejoices. Does Jill have some frustrating times with her art students? Of course she does. But I've watched her be boldly gentle with them. She gently draws out her students' ideas, gives them direction and encouragement, and refuses to be drawn into anger with them.

None of us can ever be as boldly gentle as our Lord Jesus. His boldness was the *parrhesia* (par-ray-SEE-ah) kind of boldness we've been talking about in this study. *Parrhesia* is the Greek word that describes the kind of unhesitating, confident boldness that grows out of our conviction about what God would have us do in this world. Jill's boldness is this kind of boldness, too. Who might show us what being gentle with *tolmao* (tol-MAH-oh) boldness is? The Greek word *tolmao* names boldness that is lived out with fear and trembling. We can see this kind of boldness in the woman whom Jesus healed after she had been hemorrhaging for 12 years. Let's look at this account in Mark's Gospel (Mark 5:25–34).

## LET'S TALK ABOUT BOLD GENTLENESS

- Whom in the Bible would you not describe as boldly gentle? Why?
- Tell about a time when you weren't boldly gentle with someone. If you could repeat this scene, what would you do differently?
- What boldly gentle act could you do to reach out to someone who is mentally or physically challenged and to those who care for them?

### A Boldly Gentle Touch

A certain woman bleeds not just for a few days; she bleeds for 12 years. A certain woman bleeds, and others won't touch her because they'll be ritually unclean if they do.

This is the story often called the story of the woman with a hemorrhage. You'll find it in Matthew 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34, and Luke 8:43–48. The account is a bit different in each of the three Gospels. Why is that? One reason is that the communities

from which each Gospel writer emerged and for which the Gospel was written had retained different accounts of Jesus' ministry and mission. Also the culture of each community was different, as was each community's focus on particular facets of the story about Jesus. In addition, each Gospel writer consulted slightly different sources when writing. And, finally, each writer used a different writing style and vocabulary to tell the story.

Mark 5:25–34 offers us a particularly rich account of the woman with a hemorrhage. Let's tell this story to each other again today, using the readers' theater style with which we've become familiar. We'll need three readers and the rest of the study group. The three readers take the parts of the narrator, the woman with the hemorrhage, and Jesus. We will ask the other participants in today's session to be the disciples in Mark 5:31b when that time arrives.

**Narrator:** Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said,

**Woman:** "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

**Narrator:** Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said,

**Jesus:** "Who touched my clothes?"

**Narrator:** And his disciples said to him,

**Everyone:** "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"

**Narrator:** He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had hap-

pened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her,  
**Jesus:** "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

A woman bleeds. She lives with the illness of a body that is out of rhythm. We do not know the cause and we do not know exactly how she suffered. Pain? Anemia? Possibly. We do know that she had "endured much under many physicians" (verse 26a). Many women in our time have done the same. We do know that she had spent all that she had (v. 26b). Sadly, this too is something that women today have done, if they haven't suffered the despair of going without the help they need because they have no resources. We know that "she was no better, but rather grew worse" (v. 26c).

And we know that the woman with a hemorrhage suffered because that bleeding made her unclean and untouchable. We learn that in Leviticus 15:19–24, where we read about the regulations concerning a woman with her "regular discharge." Several days of every month, a woman would be untouchable because of a normal biological function. What about someone who bled for 12 years? Read in Leviticus 15:25–30 about the plight of such a woman. Months and months of this for the woman with a hemorrhage, 12 times 12 months of this. More than 4,000 days.

Until Jesus comes along. The woman hears about him and understands that God's will and wisdom are being carried out through him. "If I but touch his clothes," she says, "I will be made well" (Mark 5:28). What insight and confidence! What gentleness and boldness! We can almost hear her thinking, "I don't need to bother him. I'll just touch the edge of his robe, and he'll never know."

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us that she touched the fringe of Jesus' garment. Jesus was an observant Jew. Numbers 15:38-40 commanded Jewish males to wear garments with fringe on the corners and a blue cord running through the fringe. Each time the wearer would see the fringe, he would be reminded of the LORD's commandments. The fringe was important. Touching it would be important to someone seeking healing.

A certain woman bleeds, and suddenly the flow, 4,000 days long, stops. Not only that, but she feels healthy for the first time in 12 years. I went to my doctor once, saying, "I just don't feel right. Something's wrong." She patiently tested me for several things, and discovered that my thyroid wasn't producing enough of a particular enzyme. It was easy to remedy. I began taking the medication she prescribed, and soon thereafter I felt normal again. Normal feels wonderful. Can you imagine how wonderful the woman in the story felt?

Now, Jesus stops because something happened when the woman boldly reached out and gently touched his clothes. The crowd traveling with him stops too. They are on their way to the home of Jairus and his daughter, who is dying. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' power heals a woman, but Jesus himself pays a price. The "power had gone forth from him" (v. 30). His question about who touched him is answered with what seems to be impatience. The disciples seem to be saying, "There's a crowd, Jesus, and there's a lot of pushing and shoving going on—how would we know who touched you!"

Jesus seems to ignore those impatient disciples. Instead he searches the crowd for the one now healed, the one who drew power from him. And now, the gentle woman boldly comes forward, though with "fear and trembling" (v. 33). She is bold with the kind of boldness described by the Greek word *tolmao*. She

does what she knows is needed, what she knows she must do because something profound has happened to her. Throwing herself to the ground, she tells Jesus "the whole truth" (v. 33). His response completes the relationship that began when she gently touched his robe. Jesus says to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." With the relationship between them complete, the healing of body, mind, and soul can be complete. The Greek verb *sozo* is translated as "made you well" here. The sentence could also have been translated as "your faith has saved you." Her faith, her trust, has more than healed the woman with a hemorrhage; it has saved her.

"Daughter," Jesus calls her. What a wonderful, gentle name to be called. And then, "Go in peace," he says, "Go in *shalom*." *Shalom* is the peace that grows when one is in right relationship with oneself, with the world around, and with God. *Shalom* is a powerful and gentle word; here it tells us that the woman's healing is complete. The woman's gentle touch is returned by Jesus' gentle response. She is healed. God is good.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE

- Imagine that you were a woman living in the time of the woman in Mark 5:25-34. What would it have been like to be unclean during the time of your "regular discharge" (Leviticus 15:19)?
- What alternatives for healing did the hemorrhaging woman have?
- Where did she find the courage both to touch Jesus' clothes and to tell him that she was the one who did this?

## LET'S TALK ABOUT OURSELVES

- Have you experienced "bleeding" of one kind or another, perhaps emotional, perhaps spiritual, for an extended period? What was that like for you?
- What bold thing have you done to seek help for yourself when you were hurting in that way?
- Do you wish that you could touch Jesus' cloak because of a brokenness that has been within you for some time? How do you bring this hurt to the Lord?

## LET'S TALK FURTHER

- How many pleas for help did Jesus encounter each day? What desperate voices begged him to heal someone deeply loved? How could he respond to all of them?
- Talk about Mark 5:40a, "And they laughed at [Jesus]." How do you, as someone who loves Jesus, handle this?
- Is there someone whom you wish Jesus could touch with new life?

### Additional Study: Jairus' Daughter

With additional time, study the context of the story about the hemorrhaging woman. It is found in Mark 5:21–24 and 35–43. As Mark 5:21 begins, Jesus is returning to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, after driving demons out of a Gerasene man and into a herd of swine, which then raced off a cliff into the sea. Jairus, a leader of the synagogue in the area where Jesus comes ashore, makes his way through

the crowd that has gathered to welcome Jesus. Jairus' plaintive cry echoes down through thousands of years to our hearts. "My little daughter is at the point of death," he pleads again and again. "Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live" (Mark 5:23).

Our gentle, courageous Lord goes off with him, only to be interrupted by the woman we met earlier. As she goes home rejoicing, Jesus hears bad news from Jairus' house. Read the rest of the story about Jairus and his daughter (Mark 5:35–43). It is a story of our Savior's remarkable gentleness with a mocking crowd, a family in distress, and a little girl who makes the journey from death to life.

### A Story: Pine and Mae

Pine and Mae met two decades ago when they were both going through tough times. It was an unlikely romance. Pine is almost 20 years older than Mae. Pine is a European American, and Mae is African American. His kids were out of the nest, but Mae's three were still in and needed all the love they could get. It was an unlikely romance, but of such things love and marriage are made, and so they married.

Together they are a beautiful couple. Mae is quiet; she likes to be a gentle presence in the background. Pine is a humble man, with a beautiful, tender smile. Pine's left side is a little crippled after the stroke he had a few years ago; he's had back surgery and some heart trouble, but none of this stops him from raising his four dozen children.

Four dozen children! What? Pine and Mae love children, and missed their own terribly when they grew up and moved out. They talked with the social services people about their loneliness. They took evaluation exercises and education courses.

## WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN BOLDLY GENTLE?

- When have you intervened with a gentle word when an argument is taking over the meeting of a committee, the council, or the congregation?
- Has your congregation reached out through Sunday school, a day-care center, or an after-school program to touch the lives of refugee children with Jesus' gentleness?
- Have you sung to sleep a troubled child or a person with advanced Alzheimer's disease?
- When have you been able to respond with a gentle word to a false accusation?
- Have you volunteered at an animal shelter or in a hospital nursery?
- Have you adopted a mile of roadside and kept it clean of trash? Have you written to your representatives urging gentleness with our world through environmental protection?
- Have you helped your congregation to become both physically and programmatically accessible to those who are physically or mentally challenged, then advertised your welcome to those for whom you have prepared?

a gentle but firm hand, as they had raised their own children and as they had raised dozens of foster children before them. They work with social workers and doctors to gentle the rough edges of children whose lives have been difficult. They go to parent-teacher meetings and make sure that homework gets done. They enforce the rules of their home with consistency and fairness. They make Sunday school and church at Emmanuel Lutheran important. And, eventually, they help their foster children make the transition to an adoptive home, with hugs and tears.

For 20 years, Pine and Mae have been blessed with foster children in their home, and they are still opening the door to them. There is no smile in the world bigger than Pine's when social services calls to ask if they can take in another foster child. And there is no heart bigger than Mae's when she opens the door to welcome that foster child. Through it all, Mae says again and again, "Pine is the best man I've ever known." Through it all, Pine smiles his gentle smile.

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**The Rev. Sue Gamelin and her husband, Tim, are pastors of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in High Point, N.C.**

And then they threw their home open to the foster children who need them desperately.

When I first met Pine and Mae, they were shepherding Destiny, 8, Joshua, 6, and Isaiah, 5. They'd had these three siblings for almost all of their young lives. When hope for returning them to their birth mother faded, the social services people worked hard to find an adoptive family that would take all three of them together. It took years. In the meantime, Pine and Mae raised these three with

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# Shalom: To Be Made Well

by Kati Kluckman-Ault





"DAUGHTER, YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL; GO IN PEACE,  
AND BE HEALED OF YOUR DISEASE" (MARK 5:34)

These are the words Jesus said to the unnamed woman on the day she boldly touched the fringe of his garment. Her cure was instantaneous as she touched his garment for one brief moment—so brief that only Jesus noticed. And then Jesus told her that it was her faith, not his garment that had made her well. And her life was changed. After 12 years of isolation, increasing poverty, and worsening health, she was made well.

We never hear about this woman again in any of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' continuing ministry. But Jesus promised her that she was made well. I wonder what the next day was like for her? How did being well translate to what was happening in her body, her mind, her heart, her relationships? And when we read this story, do we wonder how might we get a taste of this faith and wellness for ourselves?

### Healing and curing

There can be confusion around healing and curing. Clearly, in the Gospel story, the woman with the hemorrhage is cured immediately. Yet Jesus does not tell her that she is cured, but that she has been made well. Cures do happen today, but most of us have never seen an instantaneous cure—in a clinic, in our church, or anywhere else. But the New Testament is filled with stories of Jesus healing many people—can that still happen today?

When we want to be made well today, we most often seek the care of a reliable health-care provider—someone we trust, someone who is well-trained and competent. Most of the time we end up feeling better, but when was the last time your doctor said to you, "Go in peace, your faith has made you well"? We are grateful that our medical system

has helped us live healthier lives than the generations before us. We have immunizations that prevent our children from suffering crippling or fatal diseases. We have medicines that enable us to live longer even with chronic conditions like diabetes or heart disease. Surgeons can repair all kinds of physical maladies. But all this has come at a cost.

Modern medicine often gives us the promise of cure by fixing the broken parts of our bodies—that is, once we get all the body parts in working order, then we will be cured or well. We seek care from a system that promises to fix the broken parts of our physical selves but sometimes ignores our emotional, mental, or spiritual selves. All these pieces of "us" are not disconnected. We have been formed by God to be one wonderful and cohesive creation—body, mind, and spirit.

## Relieving dis-ease

When we think of being well as having all our body parts in good working order, we might sometimes fear exploring how God offers health and holistic wellness to us—a wellness that is imparted to our bodies, our minds, and our spirits. We long for healing, just as the woman with the hemorrhage did, yet are unsure of what might happen if we were made well. How will we be changed as we are made well? Simultaneously, our longing for wellness comes because we know we are not well—that we suffer from a “less-than” kind of dis-ease that permeates how we live out our day-to-day lives. That dis-ease is shown in places where we are disconnected—disconnected from our selves, our bodies, other people. How then can we receive that same kind of wellness that Jesus declared had come to life in our sister so long ago?

Our dis-ease comes because the world is not as God created it to be—a perfect wholeness visible in harmonious relationships throughout all creation—a harmony contained in the word *shalom*. When we hear *shalom*, we often think of a peaceful feeling or even the absence of contention. But this *shalom* that is God’s intention is more than that. It is a one-word

description of the perfection and harmony that permeates all the world and our self that receives wholeness, health, well being, and, yes, peace, in that *shalom*. When God created this world, and you and me, God desired this *shalom* for all. In our western view of life and the world, we often hear this great design of *shalom* in individual terms. That is, God’s *shalom* was designed so that I personally feel better or that I live in greater peace—but God has designed this *shalom* for all of creation. Since sin entered the world, it has been a place of brokenness and dis-ease where we are separated from each other and from the full expression of the wholeness that God desires for our body, mind, and spirit.

It is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that God again proclaims to us that this *shalom* is not lost. The gift of our salvation is that God again has made us well and whole.

## Shalom

Jesus told this woman that it was her faith that had made her well. Where does our own faith come into our journey to wellness? God invites us over and over again to wellness—beginning in creation and offering again in our baptism. It is in the washing of

baptism that we are reunited with the *shalom* for which God created us. Our salvation is lived out in reconciliation between God and God’s creation.

God persistently invites us to greater wellness and health in the transformational grace that is at work in each of us. As creator, God gives and sustains abundant life for us. In reconciliation, God reaches out again and again to connect us with God’s self and with each other. In a continuing work of mercy and holiness, God’s transforming love offers us renewal that is continually re-created *shalom* for our bodies, minds, and spirits.

Are instantaneous cures possible? Yes. Do they happen often? It doesn’t seem that way. Yet I will say that I have seen God’s healing power at work in many lives. I serve as parish nurse in Baltimore, Maryland, at Amazing Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in a neighborhood that struggles every day with violence, crime, addiction, and poverty. Yet, here too, God is at work in healing ways that offer people new life over and over again.

Amazing Grace is blessed to have a labyrinth behind the church. One of our members lives out her recovery from drug addiction every day. During a recent

time of great stress, she woke up one day with a very strong desire to use drugs. She says that this desire was stronger than she had felt in a very long time—and she had lived years without using drugs. She was at a loss as to how to deal with this strong craving. And so she came to the church and she walked the labyrinth. She meditated on God's healing love for her and how that keeps her clean and sober each day. She says that by the time she had finished walking the labyrinth, the intense desire was gone—and she felt better, stronger, and healthier than she had for a long time. Did God cure her that day? I don't know. But I do know that God was healing this woman and offering a taste of the wellness that is *shalom*.

Jesus still says to us each day, "Go in peace, and be healed of your dis-ease," because that is the promise of God to each of us, every day. The many forms of dis-ease that we live with are slowly healed by the persistent love of God made real in Jesus Christ. We still struggle with arthritis, tempting high-fat foods, imperfect relationships, and even a sense of our own unworthiness to receive God's grace, but none of those struggles is bigger than God's grace. Our healing takes place every day—as we remember the grace of our baptism that has marked us forever with the cross of Christ—and unites us with each other.

The day after our unnamed sister was healed of her hemorrhage, she woke up and felt slightly

strange, I am sure—she was well. But it was more than her body that was different. The healing words of Jesus were at work, and that work did not end the day she touched his garment. The effects of that day went on day after day. She no doubt could go home—she was reconnected with her family and community. She no longer had to view herself as unlovable and unclean—separated from God and neighbor. Jesus had made her well—Jesus does no less for you and for me.

**Kati Kluckman-Ault** lives in Baltimore, Md., with her husband and children. She serves at Amazing Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church as parish nurse and is a member of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference.

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## PHILIPPINES



## GEOGRAPHY

115,100 square miles of land in 7,107 islands (about the size of Arizona)

## CLIMATE

Tropical marine, with seasonal monsoons

## POPULATION

87.8 million people

## CAPITAL

Manila (pop. 1.5 million; 11.5 million in metro area)

## MAJOR RELIGIONS

92% Christian, 5% Muslim, 3% Buddhist and other

## LIFE EXPECTANCY

Men, 67 years; women, 73 years

## INFANT MORTALITY

23.5 deaths per 1,000 live births

## POVERTY RATE

40%

## LABOR FORCE

agriculture 36%, industry 16%, services 48%

## REACHING OUT TO FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS

by Anne Basye

**Luz Castro, a young Filipina, was optimistic about her future.** She looked forward to earning her own money and sharing it with her parents. When an employment agency offered her a job in Saudi Arabia, she gladly accepted.

But life in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, was not what she expected. Working as a housemaid meant long hours and low pay. Alone in a culture she didn't understand, she had no one to turn to for help when her employer's son drugged and raped her, leaving her pregnant.

Desperate for an exit visa, she lied to her employer, saying that she needed to go home to see her dying father. To maintain her cover story, she left everything behind in her room, as if leaving for a short trip.

She never returned. Soon she had a son to support. Eventually she took another job overseas, this time in Hong Kong, nearly 700 miles from her home. She is a dedicated mother and stays in close touch with her son, but she sees him for only two weeks a year, all the vacation time she has.

Castro is a foreign domestic worker (FDW). About 140,000 Filipina FDWs work in Hong Kong. Most are maids or nannies who live in their employers' homes. On Sundays, thousands of Filipinas congregate in the central district to share bag lunches and catch up with friends. Many attend a Roman Catholic church that offers services in English and Tagalog, the language of the Philippines.

Castro spends her Sunday afternoons at the Oasis hospitality room of Amazing Grace Lutheran Church, an international ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong (ELCHK), formerly known as the Filipino Fellowship. Its three dozen Filipina members are glad to see one another, speak their native language, and share home-cooked Filipino food.

Week after week, the prayers Castro participates in create a sense of peace within the Filipino community. The women pray for their children, husbands, and other relatives back home, victims of disasters, safe travel for friends, for medical care and healing, and many prayers of thanks for healing, provision, and reconciliation.

### LONG SEPARATIONS

Hong Kong is considered a good assignment for FDWs. While the pay is only about \$400 a month, most employers are fair, and infrequent cases of abuse can be addressed through the local legal system.

But it's not an easy way to earn a paycheck. It means living far from home and family. Most FDWs live in very small rooms in their employers' homes. If they lose their jobs, they lose their rooms; if they can't find new jobs within two weeks, they lose their work visas.

"We do this because we're all poor," a member said. "We have nothing. Even if we have jobs at home, it's not enough to feed and clothe and house our children and send them to school too."

That means mothers like Castro must choose between staying home and raising their children in poverty or providing for them well from a distance.

Hong Kong law guarantees FDWs two weeks of vacation. But two weeks is little time to sustain a relationship with a husband and children.

"This is hard on children and on marriages," says the Rev. Valerie Peterson, an ELCA missionary who has worked with the Filipina FDWs since 1990. "They're lucky if their marriages survive. It's all too common for men to take mistresses or second wives. We get lots of marriage-related heartache, and we're always praying for broken hearts, and helping women think about their future if husbands have left."

### WELCOMING HUGS

The membership of the Oasis hospitality room turns over often, like expatriate communities everywhere. But whether women stay in Hong Kong for six months or 16 years, they sustain one another.

Newcomers are welcomed into the community with hugs. "One first-timer told me that when I hugged her, she felt the love of Jesus," Peterson says. "To her, it wasn't a formal, superficial greeting, it was real love."

Oasis members pray for newcomers to adjust to their new life, and offer help if problems arise. "We make sure they know they are not alone," says Peterson. "The feeling of being family for each other is one of the most important things we have. Luz Castro in particular does a wonderful job of being a mother or big sister to new arrivals, sending birthday cards and thank-you notes and encouraging them."

If someone loses a job, members pray hard and provide job leads. In the meantime, the group finds short-term housing with Amazing Grace members. Women who lose their jobs are distraught. "They've just lost all their security and hopes for the future, and they are out on the street with nothing. Hearing 'come and stay with us' is important," says Peterson.

### WATCHING FOR TEARS

In the earliest days of the Filipino Fellowship, its coordinator looked for women crying on the street. Today, the women of the Oasis watch for tears among new FDWs from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India. "When our women see [an FDW] on the street, they talk to her and see if things are okay with her," says Peterson.

That's important, because the newer FDWs are younger, less educated, and more vulnerable. They know little about their rights under the law and may

## United Nations protects migrant workers

According to the United Nations, men and women have been leaving their homelands in search of work since payment for labor began. Worldwide, an estimated 185 to 192 million people live and work outside their own countries. Nearly half are women. There is no continent or region that does not have migrant workers.

Poverty and the inability to earn enough or produce enough to support oneself or one's family are major reasons behind the movement of work-seekers from one nation to another. These are not only characteristics of migration from poor to rich places; poverty also fuels movements from one developing country to others where work prospects seem—at a distance, at least—to be better.

"Millions of migrant workers are uninformed and ill-prepared to cope with life and work in a foreign country," according to a U.N. fact sheet on migrants. "Most of them are unaware of the human rights protection and fundamental freedoms which they are guaranteed under international treaties and national laws."

Women increasingly migrate without their families and send money home to their husbands and children. This economic empowerment can be a source of personal strength, but migrant workers, especially female, are vulnerable to abuse.

For foreign domestic workers, legal status in the host state depends on the employer. Domestic workers who live in their employers' homes may be cut off from friends and society. Advocates for women migrant workers urge governments to offer services for migrants who are exploited or abused.

In July 2003, the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families went into effect. Its signatories include the Philippines and other nations with large migrant populations. The Convention seeks to set standards to guide nations in shaping laws and policies that will protect migrant workers and allow them to find help if their rights are violated.

work for less than the minimum wage or work many weeks without time off. "Some aren't allowed to go out, can't use the phone, and may be paid a tenth of what their contract guarantees," says Peterson.

Abuses like this are no longer common among Filipina FDWs, who have powerful advocates in the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers and the Asian Domestic Helpers Union—both of which are supported by churches. Inspired by their sisters, the 85,000 Indonesian FDWs in Hong Kong recently formed the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers.

Thanks to Amazing Grace Lutheran and other churches, foreign domestic workers have a home away from home. Peterson says, "They have experienced Jesus as indeed alive, and he is with them. That is why they can find *shalom* [peace] even while their future is uncertain."

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**Anne Basye is associate director for global resources, ELCA Global Mission, and a member of Unity Lutheran Church, Chicago, Ill.**

## Ecumenical Prayer Cycle

The World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Prayer Cycle ([www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/01-02.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/01-02.html)) enables us to journey in prayer through every region of the world and through every week of the year affirming our solidarity with Christians all over the world. In addition to praying for Christians in the Philippines, please pray this month for people working for peace in the following countries: **East Timor, Indonesia, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia.**



GRACE NOTES

## Getting Together

by Linda Post Bushkofsky

**IT'S SPRING AND WHILE A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY MIGHT TURN TO THOUGHTS OF LOVE,** in the churchwide organization, our fancy turns to synodical conventions. Beginning in April and continuing through November, our synodical women's organizations gather in annual or biennial conventions. Nearly 50 of our 64 synodical organizations will meet in 2006.

The shape and content of these conventions is as varied as our women. Some are one-day events; others span a weekend. Some are deeply spiritual; others are practical. Whatever the shape and form of a synodical convention, you will always have the churchwide president or her representative attending your convention. She attends as much to learn from you as to pass on information to you.

The churchwide representative fills some specific roles. She'll provide you with updates on churchwide programs, resources, and finances. She often leads a workshop or presents a Bible study.

The churchwide representative's work is not done once the convention is over. She evaluates the event and reports on issues that came before the convention, including resolutions and memorials passed, the financial situation of the synodical organization, and so on. She gives the churchwide executive board a summary report about the conventions and discusses trends and concerns within synodical organizations. This is one of the ways that the different expressions of our organization function interdependently and share responsibility

for fulfilling our common purpose.

Churchwide executive board members count attending synodical conventions among their favorite responsibilities, viewing it a privilege to meet the special women dedicated to Women of the ELCA.

Sometimes the churchwide expression of Women of the ELCA can seem distant from the local congregational, inter-congregational, or special unit. The churchwide representative to your next synodical convention serves as a bridge, a resource for you. Seek her out and ask questions. Give her feedback and comments to be shared with the churchwide executive board and staff.

Make plans now to attend the convention of your synodical women's organization. Every active congregational, inter-congregational, or special unit may send a delegate who has voice and vote in the business of the organization. Congregations without an active unit may send a representative who is given voice. All women are invited to attend as participants, not just those who are currently active in Women of the ELCA.

For more information about which synodical convention you would attend or where and when it is, contact Marilyn O'Connor, assistant director of Women of the ELCA, at 800-638-3522, ext. 2727 or e-mail [Marilyn.OConnor@elca.org](mailto:Marilyn.OConnor@elca.org).

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**Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.**

# Daring and Determined

by Catherine Malotky

**GOD, YOU'D THINK BECAUSE OF OUR GENDER, MY SISTERS AND I WOULD HAVE A CORNER ON GENTLENESS.** At least that's the message you'd get from the stereotypes about us. Pictures of us are often blurry around the edges. We are posed to appear demure.

But what about my passions, God? Am I, because I'm female, supposed to be soft and flexible? What about my needs? My hopes? My dreams? Does being gentle simply mean accepting what comes and making do?

Or might the gentleness you imagine be something more? Something with backbone and courage?

That woman who hemorrhaged, whose name is not remembered, was not spineless. We don't know what kind of woman she was. But we know something of her story. Those of us who have lived through hormonal troubles (and so many of us do as we reach menopause!) know the wondering she must have lived with from day to day, month to month. Her health would have been enough of a challenge, and her culture shunned her too.

God, what kind of endurance did she have to have? What kind of resilience did she need to keep getting up in the morning? Did she ever chafe under the injustice of her plight, when yet another person avoided her? Did she ever get impatient that the doctors' attempts to help drained her purse without curing her problem? Did she ever just get tired of trying to take care of herself while still reaching out to others, caring for her family,

helping her community, or speaking her mind?

The story does not tell us about those moments. The story only tells us that she still had hope of healing, even after so many months and years. The story tells us that she heard about Jesus, and she made a plan to try once again.

She might have played the victim. She might have stormed into the crowd and demanded his attention. "Jesus! I hear you can heal people. Heal me!" She didn't. Instead, she gathered up her hope and her faith, and she made her way into the crowd, intent on touching the hem of his garment, praying that it might make a difference.

That's all. Not flamboyant. Not pushy. Not aggressive. Just determined, in faith, to touch the hem of his garment. This is the kind of gentleness that takes backbone. This is the kind of gentleness that helps us raise children, and stay in a relationship for a lifetime, and work for justice, and grow old gracefully. This is the kind of gentleness that boldly slips into the crowd in hope of finding Jesus there, and healing.

God, give me the gentle courage of this woman. Remind me that I have heard about you. Fill me with faith that you can heal whatever ails me. Call me daughter when I dare. Share your power of life. Amen.

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**Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.**